



Senator Bob Oke's LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

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ELECTION CHALLENGE UPDATE

Chelan County Superior Court Judge John Bridges signed an order on Feb. 18 confirming that the legal challenge to the governor's election will move forward. The Republican Party asked for an April 4 trial date, but Judge Bridges said he won't set a trial date until both sides have finished their discovery – the legal term for fact-finding. He did not rule on the question of what exactly the Republican Party must prove. The Democrat Party has been pushing for a ruling that the Republican Party prove how each illegal vote was cast. On Feb. 23, the Republican Party announced it had identified 1,108 felons who voted without having their civil rights restored – 884 of them in King County. The Democrat Party is saying they should be hauled into court and asked how they voted. These felons could say anything they want. Ironically, this would put the outcome of the election entirely in the hands of criminals. There is no other reasonable, rational choice but for Judge Bridges to declare the election null and void so a revote for governor can take place.

ELECTION REFORM UPDATE – NEW BILLS FILED

Senate Bill 6006 – making it unlawful for a person or organization collecting voter registration application forms to photocopy or otherwise replicate those forms. This measure also makes it unlawful for any election official to mark a blank voter registration form with the purpose of identifying the individual or organization to which the forms are given. This bill is in the Senate Government Operations and Elections Committee.

BUDGET TIDBITS...JUST THE FACTS

State Employee Automatic Salary Increases: This year, if the negotiated raises under the new collective bargaining agreement are approved, some state employees will receive a 15.6 percent salary increase over the next two years – regardless of performance. For more information, go to www.src.wa.gov and click on "Budget Tidbits...just the facts, 7th Edition."

SEN. OKE'S BILL TO HELP KEEP CIGARETTES OUT OF THE HANDS OF TEENAGERS GETS FAST-TRACKED IN HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

After becoming the first bill of the 2005 session to be approved by the Senate, **Senate Bill 5048, sponsored by Sen. Oke**, prohibiting Big Tobacco from handing out free cigarettes and chewing tobacco, sailed through the House Health Care Committee this week with a unanimous "do pass" recommendation. The chair of the committee asked that the bill be placed on the House Consent Calendar which will speed up its path to a full House vote. It is illegal to give tobacco products to persons under age 18, but there is no way to effectively prevent this at huge gatherings like concerts, rodeos and fairs. This is why Sen. Oke seeks to prohibit the practice. More than 80 percent of smokers start before age 17. Tobacco companies, which lose 400,000 customers each year in the United States from tobacco-related deaths, use sampling as a marketing technique to get new customers. Washington has had a 25-fold increase in sampling events in the last eight years.

BILL PROVIDES CIVIL RELIEF FOR SERVICE MEMBERS RETURNING FROM OVERSEAS

The very nature of military service often compromises the ability of service members to fulfill their financial obligations and to assert many of their legal rights. Congress has long recognized the need for protective legislation. During the Civil War, Congress enacted an absolute moratorium on civil actions brought against federal soldiers and sailors. In 2003, Congress enacted the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (SCRA) which completely revised the 1940 Soldiers' and Sailors' Civil Relief Act. Under the SCRA, members of the military can receive a 90-day stay from potential liability or lawsuits. **Senate Bill 6028, co-sponsored by Sen. Oke**, creates a 180-day stay in Washington State, recognizing the many active duty personnel and reservists from Washington who have been called to duty in Iraq. This bill is in the Senate Judiciary Committee.

for Washington

DEMOCRATS INTRODUCE A STATE INCOME TAX PLAN. *The Legislature may on its own impose a 1 percent income tax, but anything greater or a graduated system, must be put to the voters of the state. The current Democrat measure is an amendment to the Washington State Constitution and does require a vote of the people – even though Washington voters have rejected income tax proposals eight times since 1934. There is nothing ambiguous about this message. The people of Washington don't want an income tax. **Senate Joint Resolution 8211** amends the state Constitution to allow a graduated income tax. It would take a two-thirds majority of the House and Senate to move this measure to the November ballot. A simple majority vote of the people is required for passage. The eight "no" votes by the people against an income tax in the past have been: 56.6 percent; 77.8 percent; 66.9 percent; 66.3 percent; 68.4 percent; 77 percent; 66.8 percent and 66.2 percent. This bill is in the Senate Ways & Means Committee.*

RECENT POLL SHOWS 57% OF WASHINGTON VOTERS DON'T BELIEVE STATE GOVERNMENT SHOULD RAISE TAXES FOR ANY REASON

A poll of 500 voters across Washington in January of this year, asked if people agreed or disagreed with this statement: "State government should live within its 7 percent revenue growth and should not raise taxes for any purpose." In every area polled —except Seattle— the majority agreed: 64 percent in non-Seattle King County; 57 percent in Kitsap/Pierce/Snohomish counties; 54 percent in other parts of Western Washington; and 66 percent in Eastern Washington. By party, 70 percent of Republicans agreed; 67 percent of independents agreed; and 42 percent of Democrats agreed. The poll was conducted by the public opinion research firm, Moore Information, and has a 95 percent confidence level.

DEMOCRATS' POLITICAL "RETRO-BUTION" BILL GETS HEARING

Retrospective rating ("retro") is an optional financial incentive program offered by the state Department of Labor and Industries (L&I) to increase workplace safety by refunding part of an employer's industrial insurance premiums for creating a safer workplace. To be in a group plan, a company must belong to a sponsoring association that maintains a contract with L&I to administer the group program. Participation in a group retro program is voluntary and every industry is served by several retro groups. There is healthy competition.

One sponsoring group is the Building Industry Association of Washington (BIAW). Since the 2004 general election, the BIAW has used some of its funds to identify illegal votes and promote a revote for governor petition. Democrats, backed strongly by unions, have introduced a bill that limits the use of a sponsoring group's funds to administrative costs or to be retained as reserves to meet any assessments made by the L&I.

The Democrats' summary of this bill is as follows: "Provides for substantially improving worker safety, accident prevention, and worker outcomes through the department of labor and industries' retrospective rating program."

Senate Bill 5842 is not about worker safety, it is simply a way for the Democrat Party to get back at BIAW for its role in the revote effort. It's a blatant attack on Washington citizens' constitutional rights to free speech and free association.

This bill is in the Senate Labor, Commerce, Research and Development Committee and was given a public hearing on Feb. 24.

WASHINGTON STUDENTS CAN EARN SCHOLARSHIPS WITH WASL PERFORMANCE

Students who perform at the highest levels in math and science on the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) may become eligible for scholarships at the DigiPen Institute of Technology in Redmond. The first scholarships are to be awarded to students entering the institute in fall 2005. The scholarships will cover 50 percent of total tuition costs -- \$13,800 for a two-year program and \$26,000 for a four-year program. The institute offers two-, four- and six-year degree programs in game development, computer engineering, 3D computer animation and related areas.

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION ACTIVATES NEW TRAVEL TIME SIGNS ON I-5, I-405 AND I-90

New travel time signs will allow travelers to know in an instant how long it will take them to get to Seattle or Bellevue from surrounding communities. Research shows that drivers who have information feel more in control and are therefore less likely to become frustrated or to feel road rage. Drivers can also make better choices about which roads to take or call their place of work, their home or their daycare to let someone know if they will be late.

2010 OLYMPICS IN CANADA PRESENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR AMERICAN ARCHITECTURAL, CONSTRUCTION AND ENGINEERING TRADES

American firms wanting to do business in Canada in connection with the \$10 billion projects for the 2010 Olympics are invited to attend a March 17 conference in Lynnwood. A guide will be distributed at the conference. More information can be obtained by visiting Snohomish County's WorkSource Web site at: www.worksourceonline.com.

Legislative toll free hotline: 1-800-562-6000

TTY: 1-800-635-9993

Senate Republican Web site: www.src.wa.gov

Legislature's Web site: <http://www.l.leg.wa.gov/legislature>